

Social Distance Through Music in EFL Students

María Gemma Sánchez González 

University of Extremadura, Muñoz Chaves, 3 Cáceres, 10003, Spain.
sanchez_gemma@hotmail.com

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Abstract

Music is constantly around us and, if in English, it fosters social distance in EFL students, consequently increasing the level of affinity with the language, however, can social distance help with other personal aspects? Music lyrics provide different perspectives that can become enriching on an academic level, as music brings cultural aspects of the country of origin and directly affects emotions, therefore song lyrics may become a very powerful instrument when combining social distance and the level of English of students in order to improve academic and future professional performance, among others.

The aim of this study was to measure the impact of social distance on the improvement of academic performance, emotional states and future prospects in EFL students. In order to measure those variables, a questionnaire, based on the Likert scale, was conducted amongst 82 students from different educational centres (Spain). Resulting data analysed with the use of the structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) revealed the relevance of social distance through music in order to improve learning processes, to feel emotions and to consolidate hopes for future prospects.

Key words: EFL students; emotions; future prospects; music lyrics; social distance

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1. Introduction

Music is an academic resource that seems to meet all purposes and tick all boxes, since it is one of the most important resources of intellectual, cultural, artistic as well as technological and economical strength nowadays. The fact that young individuals devote a considerable amount of time to listening to music, an activity always on the increase, is worth mentioning. Apart from that, music reflects emotions, and emotions are aroused by different types of music (Sloboda & Juslin, 2001), and if matched with lyrics, emotions increase, directly affecting human nature, for instance, pulse rate, facial expression, movement or skin conductance (Ménard et al., 2015).

A suitable and most convenient scenario is therefore provided by music to engage people in different activities, frames of mind, ethical values (Nicolás & Azorín, 2013), which can benefit relationships of all kinds. Music has the ability to engage and must not be neglected as an academic tool to assess cultural aspects such as values portrayed by music in today's world (Sánchez González, 2020).

On the other hand, it needs to be mentioned that the limbic system (known as the *emotional brain*), which is a part of the brain in charge of emotions and moods resulting in various connections, directly affects processes such as memory and learning skills. The acquisition of a language involves psychological representations of the world around us, but also the combination of emotional factors, either in a conscious or non-conscious manner. Learners of a language create a relationship with that specific language because it is a representation of themselves and the social group they belong to. The language has the ability to transmit sociocultural, existential and emotional identity, which is a motivational reason to learn it (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

The comprehension of another language provides an easier interpretation of social situations in different settings and the increased ability in digital literacy comes as a *plus* to be updated with technologies. All in all, linguistic meanings and emotions are the foundations of attitude change. It can be stated that language is a cognitive ability that is unique to human beings, as it involves sensory and motor systems as well as memory and attention mechanisms supporting social cognition (Fedorenko, 2014). That social cognition involves how we perceive people and the surrounding world, which then can be influenced by social distance in regards to foreign languages.

According to Alcaraz Varó (2000, p. 14), EFL "is the first choice in primary and secondary education curriculums of nearly every country". Having a command of another languages drives students to become independent in both ideas and actions with a more critical outlook, as the language provides an approach of diverse cultural aspects and social standards, resulting in different ways of thinking.

In addition, once the compulsory secondary education stage has been completed by students, the option to enroll in vocational training education is available. This educational branch offers some courses where English as a foreign language is compulsory, which would help, among other subjects, to prepare students to enter the world of work (Niittylahti et al., 2019), which is linked to vocational areas such as business, economics and/or commerce (Fuller, 2015) in order to give them a change to complete their practical education and facilitate their transition from being a student to being an independent professional with a critical perspective.

Bearing in mind that globalisation has affected all corners of life and the exchange of information through English is an undeniable fact brings the concept of social distance. As claimed by Schumann (1994), social distance as one of a range of social factors influencing language learning. Migration or intellectual connections are different characteristics that cause social distance in different groups. Now, can music foster social distance? Competence in a foreign language is required to be able to understand the lyrics of songs in order to detect structure and meaning of words.

According to Abbott (2002), feelings or ideas can be portrayed in songs, as they utter cultural aspects, which can then be used in listening activities in the classroom for the enjoyment and excitement of learners of a second language or foreign language, who moved by social distance, and wishing to be part of what they listen to, can improve their level of the language among other aspects.

When music lyrics in a foreign language are listened to carefully and are felt as own, social distance becomes key to understand and embrace the culture portrayed in that piece of music. This fact could help vocational training students in their daily working performance as well as in their future prospects as music can be a multifunctional tool not only to relax or motivate while working but also to learn.

2. Literature review

Encouraged by the research question: Can social distance through music, assisted by emotions, improve academic and professional prospects in EFL students?

2.1 Advantages of learning English as a second language and Music in English (ME)

It is broadly accepted that English is the common language used nowadays in every branch of knowledge. It has become an asset needed for success. The reasons and scopes to use it are endless, from academic to professional fields. Flowerdew and Peacock (2001, p. 10) state that "the international language of research and academic publication is English" in the sense that this language is necessary to access research fields (Alcaraz Varó, 2000; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). English has become an international language to exchange all kinds of information (González Davies & Celaya Villanueva, 1992; Alcaraz Varó, 2000; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001). As Graddol (1997, p. 50) states, the English language plays a very important role as a *lingua franca*, which is now backed up by the use of the internet and rapid technological changes. On their part, Richards et al. (1992, p. 187) refer to English as a second language, as a language for international communication. All around the globe English is being taught and learnt at different academic levels (González Davies & Celaya Villanueva, 1992; Kachru and Nelson, 2001).

As postulated by North & Hargreaves (1997, p.1) "music has many different functions in human life, nearly all of which are essentially social", therefore any experience related to music can have an impact on personality and due behaviour. Music can be and assisting tool (Tarrant et al., 2000) for pronunciation skills and other acquisitions aspects where emotions are involved, including the activation of memory and recall (Fonseca-Mora, 2000). It is appropriate to mention the use of music to promote motivation and engagement with students, which will facilitate the learning of a different language. It is one of the main recreational activities for young people, which influences their identities and preferences in life. Music affects health and well-being as it can change behaviours in beneficial ways (MacDonald et al., 2012).

When immersed in the language, the social distance factor has an impact on them as they need to adapt to another culture and new contexts to be able to understand and embrace them (Sam & Berry, 2010). Having command of another language becomes an asset not only to individuals but

also to society in general, as it enables the person to have different perspectives in life, better understanding and approaches of the surrounding world and more specifically, of other specific cultures. In the vocational training classroom, when practicality should reign, the use of music no doubt would offer a scenario for better performance and enhancement of the social distance factor. The above statements lead to the following hypotheses:

H1: Music in English (ME) positively influences social distance (SD)

H4: Music in English (ME) positively influences the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

2.2 Social distance (SD) in learning processes

As claimed by Sam & Berry (2010), the acculturation process involves modification and sharing of social norms and patterns of another group of reference, therefore, social distance can have a relevant impact on learning processes related to foreign languages. These processes are related to emotions created in the limbic system and those emotions may easily come from listening to music, emerging from cognitive and affective approaches. According to the social distance statement by Schumann (1994), should attitudes be considered, the feelings and emotions of reference groups regarding the language in question can be improved by music in that language and directly have a relevant positive impact on learning skills.

The size and relevance of the English language as a *lingua franca* is a reason to perceive the social distance factor in learning. Music is connected to affective and unconscious factors (Fonseca-Mora, 2000) and seem to settle in our memories. Having command of another language becomes an asset not only to individuals but also to society in general, as it enables the person to have different perspectives in life, better understanding and approaches of the surrounding world and more specifically, of other specific cultures.

On their part, Do and Schallert, (2004) affirmed that linguistic meanings are associated with emotions and emotional processes, influenced by stimuli, and can have an impact on perceptions of those who are learning. As pointed out by McLean (1980, p. 17) "Learning is most effective when

the learner is the initiator of the learning process". This process can be facilitated by the fact that music is an enjoyable activity commonly used for learning processes. In the case of English in EFL students in Spain, it must be pointed out that, to some extent, every student has some knowledge of the language and when emotions are involved in the listening of a song, translating comes into play. Translating emotions (Izard, 2002) is an unprecedented fact in lyrics of most preferred songs.

In Spain, a country highly influenced by music in English, young people are updated with music trends and enjoy listening to music in their devices everywhere they go, feeling connected with their favourite artists. This information leads to the following hypotheses:

H2: Social Distance (SD) positively influences emotions (E). H5: Social Distance (SD) positively influences the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

2.3 Emotions (E) as a key factor in learning

Music is well-known for being a form of expression and a way to produce feelings and combine emotions through the words used in them, with a subsequent impact on people's perceptions of different aspects of life. Diverse types of music create different emotions (Sloboda & Juslin, 2001) and, if accompanied by lyrics, which represent an array of realities we may be familiar with, feelings and emotions do increase leading to learning processes, which, influenced by the limbic system, may modify beliefs and attitudes in people (Aragão, 2011; Do & Schallert, 2004). The role of emotions is paramount in these processes as they are involved in neurological changes in the brain. Affective factors need to be considered regarding language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) where the control of emotions becomes paramount. Besides, memories that occur during a particular emotional state will be recalled easier should a similar emotion state take place. The limbic system is involved in classifying experiences that are stored in the brain either consciously or unconsciously.

Going deeper into the topic, Krashen (1982) proposed the so-called "affective filter" hypothesis stating that the level of anxiety of a learner is key for language input, therefore when

anxiety is low, the accessibility to language input increases and language acquisition then takes place. The role played by emotions in learning processes actually depends on several cognitive and motivational mechanisms; motivation is one of them (Pekrun et al., 2002).

Listening to music can be a calming as well as an exciting activity for academic purposes leading to language acquisition. This "affective filter" being influenced by motivation and self-confidence can boost language input and acquisition. Schumann (1994) postulates that "the brain is the seat of cognition, that cognitive processes are neutral processes, and that, in the brain, affect and cognition are distinguishable but inseparable therefore providing a concept of affective filter related to the brain's stimulus regarding the appraisal system involved with cognition in order to promote or inhibit second-language acquisition". Music becomes a very valuable tool, academically speaking, to create a positive environment in the classroom for different purposes:

mood enhancement, coping with distress, identity construction and social identity formation. Music's consoling effects were reported as resulting particularly from the sound and texture of the music itself, from attribution of personal meaning to music's lyrics, and, to a lesser extent, from perceptions of closeness to artists and other listeners. (Bogt et al., 2011, p. 147).

The understanding and assignation of emotions to a foreign language becomes paramount to develop attitudes. Feelings and emotions then become of special interest in learning processes related to the English language in order to be able to understand song lyrics. The combination of variables such as motivation and emotions may have different meanings for each individual as well as different outcomes when motivation comes into play (Do & Schallert, 2004).

According to Punset (2012, p. 110), "emotions are the result of how we experience, physically and mentally, the interaction between our inner world and the outer world. For a human, emotions are expressed through behaviors, expressions of feeling, and physiological changes. Although the basic emotions are universal, the emotional experiences, or feelings, are more personal in as much as they infect each person's mood, temperament, personality, disposition, and motivation".

A field of imagination and feelings are provided by music thanks to the emotional factor, which materialises in lyrics. It is somehow a force that unifies music listeners and that is unique

(Levitin, 2006). Emotional experiences are key in language learning processes (Shoaib & Dörnyei, 2004), since emotions of any nature may have an impact on the motivational behaviour of language learners (Pekrun et al., 2002). Emotional states are key in learning, since learning is one of the major sources of human emotions nowadays (Pekrun et al., 2002) leading to both academic and professional success. Emotions are key in human nature leading to different present and future behaviour and actions. If emotions are raised by music while working or studying, performance may be bettered. These statements lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Emotions (E) positively influence the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

3. Methodology

With the purpose to provide a context, meet the aim of the study (measure the impact social distance through music in English on students), and to be able to both predict and comprehend the phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 1994), the quantitative method by means of a questionnaire was considered the best option for this type of study. The SmartPLS programme (Ringle et al., 2015) was employed with the SEM-PLS (structural equation model-partial least squares) multivariate technique in order to study the relationships among the proposed variables (either unobservable or latent). SEM models are frequently used in social sciences branches and are highly recommended to test hypotheses.

Constructs are variables that were extracted from the literature review in order to draft the items of the final questionnaire. Primary and secondary sources of data collection were employed and implemented, as recommended by Cooper and Schindler (2006) with the aim to answer the previously posed research question. The first stage of this study focused on searching for related literature on music and impact on young people, in particular on how EFL students. Then a connection with social distance with the motions raised by music was sought in order to prove the benefits of music in English for future academic and professional prospects.

3.1 Justification of variables and items

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The design of the constructs aimed at defining the items for the questionnaire; previous literature concepts by different authors were considered.

Table 1. Justification of variables

Constructs and items	Indicators
ME: Music in English	
1. I translate and try to understand songs in English	ME1: Relaxed attitude to understand another language if interested in the song lyrics. (Krashen,1982)
2. Understanding English makes me enjoy songs in that language more	ME2: Interpretation of linguistic input of a known language. (Fedorenko, 2014)
3. Musical activities in English helps improve my level of English	ME3: Musical activities to increase command of a foreign language. (Fonseca-Mora, 2000; Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011)
SD: Social distance	
1. Speaking in English makes me feel part of the culture of that language	SD1: Social distance linking and motivating L2 (Sam & Berry, 2010; Schumann, 1994)
2. English is an asset to have for academic and professional projects	SD2: English as a lingua franca. (Graddol, 1997; Alcaraz Varó, 2000)
3. I believe the English language is essential for both personal and affective needs	SD5: English as a cohesion factor. (Sam & Berry, 2010)
E: Emotions	
1. I believe music can encourage me to be more productive and affective in my relations	E1: Motivation to encourage learning and efficiency. (Gardner & Lambert, 1972)
2. I believe music is the perfect channel to express my feelings and emotions	E2: Emotions and feelings through music. (Sloboda & Juslin, 2001)
IAPPYP: Improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people	
1. Music engages people from all corners of life	IAPPYP1: Music, an engagement instrument. (Nicolás & Azorín, 2013)
2. I believe music raises awareness of different realities in the world	IAPPYP2: Music to assist different purposes (Tarrant et al., 2000)

Considering the information above, five hypotheses can be drawn, whose direction is detailed in the model (see Figure 1).

H1: Music in English (ME) positively influences social distance (SD)

H2: Social Distance (SD) positively influences emotions (E)

H3: Emotions (E) positively influence the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

H4: Music in English (ME) positively influences the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

H5: Social Distance (SD) positively influences the improvement of academic and professional prospects of young people (IAPPYP)

The arrows in Figure 1 represent the paths of the dependent variables leading to the independent variable and the strong connection among them.

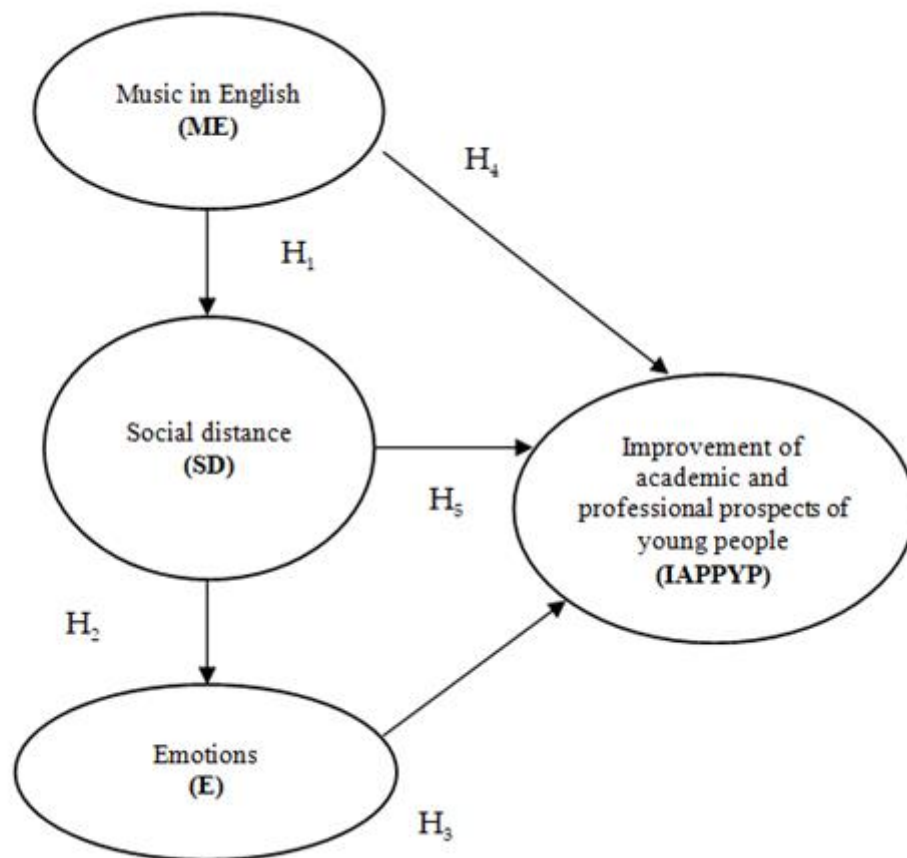


Figure 1. Model designed.
Source: Own

3.2 Instrument

A Likert scale-based questionnaire, with 10 items related to music in English, social distance and emotions, previously drafted by means of Google forms, was sent to three different groups of vocational training students, by email, with a direct link to the questionnaire. The first draft of the questionnaire was previously tested with 5 random students by means of WhatsApp groups previously arranged by the researcher using a mobile phone.

3.3 Population

A total of 82 (n=82) participants specialising in oral hygiene, dental prosthetics, and telecommunications from two vocational training centres in Extremadura, and ages ranging from 19-36, were randomly selected. First a brief introduction of the topic was given to them to provide some basic guidelines related to confidentiality, time frames and honesty in their responses. They were encouraged to take part in the study by offering research credit. The participants, who claimed to have a lower intermediate level of English, duly responded to the questionnaire.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the evaluation of the measurement model (Henseler et al., 2015), which exhibits the construct reliability performed to ensure internal consistency of the indicators of the study regarding the concept they represent. On his part, Chin (1998) suggest that the model is considered acceptable if the loads are greater than 0.5. This is measured by means of the Cronbach's Alpha, whose measure criteria should be around 0.70, also by the rho A2, by the Composite Reliability (CR), with also a measure range of 0.70, and the convergent validity of the latent variables, assessed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE); this means that a group of items is actually representing a construct.

Convergent validity refers to the level at which two measures of the same concept do correlate. Table 2 displays how all latent variables are about 0.50, a condition recommended in

order to justify half of the variance of its indicators (Henseler et al., 2009). This condition is fulfilled by all values in this particular case.

The measure proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) shows the variance obtained by a construct from its indicator in regards to the variance, due to the measurement error. The values of the composite reliability through the extracted mean variance should stay above the recommended limits of 0.7 and 0.5 respectively, which is actually verified in the study. Here, the four constructs show an AVE with values ranging from 0.598 to 0.620, which actually confirms the suitability of the convergent validity used in the model. As for the internal consistency reliability, the composite reliability of each construct, which in this case exceeds the value of 0.7, reveals a measurement model with adequate internal consistency reliability. The confidence intervals here, 2.5% and 97.5% respectively, showed strong relationships in variance in regards to the constructs mentioned in the study.

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
ME	0.821	0.821	0.820	0.603
IAPPYP	0.859	0.862	0.858	0.603
E	0.833	0.832	0.830	0.620
SD	0.812	0.819	0.817	0.598

5. Discussion

Up to the present moment, not much research has been found on how social distance in second language users' perception of the meaning of song lyrics can have a positive impact on their future professional lives.

According to Abbott (2002), songs utter cultural aspects, among which feelings or ideas can be mentioned and these can be properly received through listening activities for the enjoyment of learners of a foreign language. After all, music is a multi-purpose tool for learners, as it comes with cultural baggage and new trends that can improve the understanding and perception of those.

Having in mind that the aim of the study was to measure the impact of social distance on the improvement of academic performance, emotional states and future prospects in EFL students, and that the path modeling validated the hypotheses (within 2.5% and 97.5% confidence intervals), results then confirmed the robust relationships in variance among the constructs that have been previously designed.

Vocational studies are known for having a more practical approach for future work perspectives. In the present study, the variable of the level of English in vocational training students was considered due to the fact that English is compulsory in some of its courses, which have a relevant load of practical activities and also the fact that music in English is continuously being played, including work settings, making English as a foreign language as well as an international language relevant in their lives.

The model introduced showed how social distance through English music may have a relevant impact on the understanding of the language and cultural aspects by means of emotions raised with music lyrics, and consequently improve future prospects in their professional and personal lives. This study has combined different variables that are present in most societies to show how useful music can be in order to change perceptions, increase motivation and hopes for professional prospects of the participants.

In general terms, results confirmed the relationships of the variables previously posed to demonstrate a correlation between music in English, social distance and emotions resulting in better understanding and future expectations, as English is always a useful resort in all fields of knowledge.

Participants would pay attention to lyrics in a foreign language and try to translate them if they liked the song; that would make them enjoy them with more intensity and improve their command of the language. Music would be seen as encouraging for personal and professional prospects and as a channel for emotions as well as to understand the culture of other realities. The combination of emotions through words in song lyrics has a subsequent impact on emotions, productivity and engagement with other realities, therefore the appropriateness of the variables and hypotheses can predict the suitability of the model proposed. The external variables Music in

English (ME) Social distance (SD) and Emotions (E) then converge into the internal variable Improvement of Academic and Professional Prospects of Young People (IAEPPYP).

All in all, being the research question: Can social distance through music, assisted by emotions, improve academic and professional prospects in EFL students?

The analysis of the variables and results provided a positive answer.

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, society is immersed in a musical globalisation process, however not much research has been conducted on the field of music in English as extra reinforcement for other academic fields such as the world of emotions or to improve future prospects in young people studying English as a foreign language.

An understandable and most suitable connection between social distance regarding music in English has been proven in this study and their impact on the perceptions of EFL students about personal paths. The social distance phenomenon, as stated by Schumann (1994), is a factor with direct impact on language learning processes. This study confirms that. Results have shown that music in English can play a relevant role in the education of students and that awareness of that fact can actually provide a different outlook for the teaching community in terms of using an enjoyable activity to complement and reinforce important concepts.

Considering all of the statements above and the results of the study, four main conclusions can be drawn:

First, highly similar responses enabled to quantify social distance in the participant's perceptions of English as a useful resort for their future prospects, considering this language essential in their lives. Data obtained predicts attitude change.

Second, Social Distance (SD) can be considered as a determining factor in the world of music in a foreign language, as a language comes with culture and social beliefs and, as proven by the

study. The combination of emotions through words in song lyrics has a direct impact on perceptions such as English as a valuable asset for future prospects.

Third, the model has been presented to propose music in English as a tool to use when teaching young people, as it opens the door to new pedagogy and the world of emotions in a different language and, as proven by results, students are open and encouraged to learn through music.

Fourth, Music in English (ME) leads to Social Distance (SD), which involves Emotions (E) resulting in an Improvement of Academic and Professional Prospects of Young People (IAPPYP) as provided by the very similar responses given by students.

From results obtained, some theoretical as well as practical implications can be drawn. On the one hand, this study backs up previous research conducted on the field of music in the English classroom and benefits thereof. The methodological utility can not be denied, as it becomes an assisting tool for teachers of all fields as music is always a tool that entertains and helps retain aspects of knowledge. Besides, emotions and values from those emotions connected with music are worth a mention as they are socially relevant showing feelings and prediction of a particular generation of students.

Awareness is one of the practical implications provided by this study, as it allows the academic community to make use of musical resources in English, a language known by most students in Spain, considering the cultural baggage of music to explore other fields of knowledge and improve teaching methods. The findings of this study will be an important source of information for academic purposes and also be the basis for future lyrics research.

Regarding limitations, the sample size (82 subjects), the location (mainly Extremadura-Spain) and the cultural bias of the researcher (an English teacher in Spain) needs to be considered as limiting conditions that could have slightly affected results, however this fact can set the base for similar scenarios involving EFL students.

As a recommendation, further research on how songs in English may affect EFL learners in their ethical and social standards is advised as it could broaden literature of foreign languages and

impact on L2 students and give light to yet an undiscovered inner world of emotions and music in English as a tool for learning and improvement of professional prospects.

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